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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effectiveness of a Family Links program of literacy instruction for at-risk kindergarten students from Morse Street School in Freeport, Maine. Nine students from a classroom of 28 students qualified for and completed the program that provided before-school literacy instruction (including parent volunteers) for two hours each week for six months. Students in the experimental and control groups were measured (pretest and posttest) using the Morse Street Marker Book Assessment and the Reading Recovery Observational Survey. Four workshops for families of students were planned and implemented. Parents completed a survey. Results indicated that students in the experimental group achieved higher literacy development than their at-risk peers in the control group. Survey responses were extremely positive regarding all aspects of the program. (Contains four tables of data; an appendix contains survey instruments.) (RS)

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Family Links Report
Morse Street School
Freeport, Maine
1998

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AS 013265

Kyle Rhoads
Family Links Teacher

Kyle Rhoads
Executive Summary
Family Links Report

Approach: At risk kindergarten students from Morse Street School and their families participated in a before-school program that provided students with two, one hour sessions of literacy instruction. The sessions in which parents of students volunteered began in January of 1998 and ended in June of 1998. Parents were required to attend three out of four training workshops as part of the program.

Goals:

1. To increase at risk student literacy skills

2. To increase parent knowledge of literacy acquisition.

3. To strengthen the home-school connection and family aspirations.

4. To examine the literacy performance of students involved in the program compared to at risk students who participated in the regular kindergarten program.

Strategies:

1. Students of an experimental group and a control group were measured (pretest and posttest) using the Morse Street Marker Books and the Reading Recovery Observational Survey.

2. Students of Family Links Program received two hours of extra literacy instruction each week from 1/98 to 6/98.

3. Four workshops for families of students were planned and implemented.

4. The results of student scores from both experimental and control group were analyzed using Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test for statistical significance.

5. Parents of Family Links students completed surveys at the end of the program.

Findings/Results: The study demonstrated that at risk students who receive literacy instruction beyond the regular kindergarten program at Morse Street School achieve higher literacy development than do their at risk peers. The compared scores of both groups from pretest to posttest reached statistical significance at the .01 level. Survey responses were extremely positive regarding all aspects of the program.

Introduction

In January of 1998, a program that was funded by a Title VI Federal Grant was created for families of at-risk kindergarten students at Morse Street School in Freeport, Maine. The primary purpose of this grant was to increase the literacy skills and concepts of kindergarten students identified at risk for school failure. The grant allowed identified kindergarten students to have two one hour literacy sessions each week before the school day began. A parent of each student volunteered approximately a half an hour per week of time to the program and participated in at least three out of four evening workshops concerning literacy skills and concepts.

It was the belief of the writers of the grant that this experimental study would begin to implement a plan to ensure that there is motivation, enrichment and guidance for low-to-medium achieving students in their first year of schooling. We believe that the parent's role is integral to a child's success in school. Research has supported this. As James Vopat wrote in The Parent Project:

> One way to unite the twin goals of school reform and parent advocacy is to establish learning collaborations among parents, their children and their children's teachers...Rather than viewing parents, teachers, school and home as distinct and separate we need to honor the primary relationship they all have in common: learning and how to insure the success.

The writers of the grant believed that parent training alongside intensive literacy instruction for students would increase the likelihood that at risk students would achieve academic success in our school system. We believed that a program which combined an extended school day, increased amounts of intense literacy instruction, required, continued parent involvement, and trained parents to better support their children would be an extremely effective way to meet the educational needs of at risk students. An objective of the study was that parents of kindergarten students would grow in awareness of strategies to help further the education of their child. Therefore, at risk students would improve their academic skills and their confidence as readers and writers.

The research problems discussed in this paper are as follows "Do differences exist in the literacy performance of students from the Family Links Program when compared to at risk students who received the regular kindergarten program?" and "What are the positive impacts for parents of being involved in the Family Links program?". These questions will be discussed at the end of this paper. The writer will provide results and conclusions.

Method

Sample

The sample was created by convenience from the twenty-eight students assigned to the Room 8 kindergarten classroom at Morse Street School for the 1997-1998. Students were selected for the study by using the Morse Street Marker Book Assessment to measure students' literacy abilities. This assessment tool that was locally created assesses students' independent reading grade level. Students read books that are designed to be at grade level for kindergarten, and from grade one to grade five. If a student scores at 95% accuracy on the Marker Book, the student reads a book at the next highest grade level. All students involved in this study scored below 95% accuracy on the mid-year level kindergarten Marker Book. From the twenty-seven students assessed from Room 8, twelve qualified for the program by scoring below 95% accuracy. Parents were contacted and ten accepted invitation to join the Family Links program and this study. Nine students completed the program which lasted from the second week in January to the third week in June. One student did not complete the program. Three girls and six boys participated in the program.

A control group for the study was selected at Morse Street School. The criteria for selection to the program were as follows. The student had to score below 95% on the mid year Marker Book for kindergarten. These students did not receive literacy instruction beyond the normal kindergarten school program. The students for the control group came from three classrooms at Morse Street School.

Measurement (Pretest and Posttest)

Students in the Family Links program were tested using the Marker Books as previously mentioned. They were, also, tested using the Reading Recovery Observational Survey before completing the first week of the program. The control group was tested using the Marker Books and the Observational Survey, too. The students in the control group received the Observational Survey by the end of the second week in February.

Treatment

Students in the control group participated in the regular kindergarten classroom. Students nor parents of the control group received instruction in literacy beyond what was provided during the regular school day.

All regular kindergarten teachers had more than one year experience teaching primary grade students. All three teachers teach students in a similar fashion. Little curricular difference exists between classes as the

principal holds routine roundtable meetings amongst the teachers to discuss teaching practice and specifically teaching practice concerning literacy instruction. All teachers hold bachelor degrees. The class sizes of all the classes were between twelve and fifteen. The classes were heterogeneously placed by using the students' scores from the Brigance Kindergarten Screening Instrument. Observations made by screeners are, also, used to make classes heterogeneous by both social and academic criteria.

Beyond the regular kindergarten sessions, students in the Family Links program received two one hour literacy sessions with instruction being provided by a kindergarten teacher and an educational technician. Both teacher and educational technicians have been trained in the New Zealand Model of teaching literacy at the primary grades. All educators were experienced with more than five years experience with instructing primary age students. Students participated in small group instruction led or supported by either the teacher, educational technician, or a volunteer. Students worked both in one-one scenarios as well as small groups of up to five students. Parents participated both as volunteers and as workshop participants.

Students in the Family Links program participated in a variety of activities. In small group, they read books both in Shared and Guided Reading. Adults did language experience activities with students. The teacher modeled for students reading and writing behaviors. Students were involved in phonemic awareness activities such as pulling apart words, clapping syllables, rhyming words, and tapping sounds of words. Students read books independently. Students in small group wrote sentence strips. Once familiar with the sentence strips, students used them to practice decoding print and practicing the cueing systems with a peer. Students wrote in journals with the support of an adult and a letter sheet (enclosed in the appendix). Students in small group and individually developed word families, practiced increasing sight word vocabulary, and participated in cloze activities.

Parent(s) of each student in the Family Links Program received treatment, too. They were trained by the Family Links teacher to work both in small group and individually with all of the students in the program when they volunteered each week. The training took place during the program sessions two mornings per week. Each parent was taught a variety of techniques and activities to use during their volunteering time as well as to carry over and use with their own child at home. Expectations and the reasoning behind the use of the techniques and activities were presented to parents as they actively volunteered in the Family Links Program and during the four evening workshops.

Parents were, also, required to attend at least three out of four workshops provided by the teacher and one of the two educational

technicians who ran the Family Links morning sessions. The parents were presented information on these topics: reading aloud to child, the reading process, semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic cueing system, encouraging writing, the writing process, reading strategies, and summer ideas to continue the literacy development of a young child. Each workshop lasted approximately one hour in length. The sessions consisted of presentation of information, discussions amongst participants, reviewing handouts, question and answer sessions, video, and hands-on activities to take and use at home with their child. Parents received a three ring binder to hold all handouts that were used during workshops.

Limitations

As with any study, this study had certain limitations. The study would have been stronger if it could have been a longitudinal study instead of only one half year in length. Students will hopefully be able to be tracked for the remainder of the time they are enrolled at Morse Street School to study the long term impacts of the Family Links Program. The sample and control group were small and were identified as at risk by student scores on the Marker Book assessment. Students of the program originated all from the same teacher who was also the teacher who instructed them as part of the Family Links Program. Students from a variety of teachers may have strengthened the study but this was not possible within the available information on students and the scope of the study.

Further, certain variables were not considered for the placement of the sample and control group that could have impacted results. Gender of student, preschool experience and economic and education level of parents are examples of such variables. However, students of both groups' literacy performance was measured from pretest and posttest based on real differences using the Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test.

The Marker Books used to assess both groups are not normed like the Observational Survey that was also used to measure student progress. The Marker Books have been used for more than three years at Morse Street School and have been found to be quite valid as well as reliable. Teachers have supported the reliability and validity of the test to measure student reading level and the assessment has appeared valid when compared to other normed reading assessments. The Marker Book assessments were administered to the sample by the Family Links teacher. However, the Observational Survey assessments were administered by the literacy strategist teacher to both sample and control.

Results

Pretest Scores

The mean score of the sample group on the observational survey pretest was 63. The mean score of the control group on the observational survey was 75. The mean score on the midyear, kindergarten Marker Book for the sample was 87. The mean score on the midyear, Marker Book for the control group was 93.

Posttest Scores

The mean score of the sample group on the observational survey posttest was 120. The mean score of the control group on the observational survey was 93.75. The mean score on the end of the year, kindergarten Marker Book for the sample was 95.66. The mean score on the end of the year, kindergarten Marker Book for the control group was 85.88.

Parent Survey Data

Parents were asked to fill out anonymous surveys regarding both the workshops and the morning sessions. The workshop survey (enclosed in the appendix) was given to parents at the end of the last workshop. Parents during the last two weeks of the program received the morning session survey (enclosed in the appendix). All parents were given a self-addressed stamped envelope to send both surveys to the school. Parents were provided time to ask any questions after reviewing the surveys.

Overwhelming, the majority of responses were positive regarding the workshops and the overall program. Six families responded to the workshop survey and five families responded to the program survey. 100% of respondents thought that the workshops and the morning program should be continued in the future.

What the families liked best about the workshops were:

Learning new strategies and ideas to use with their child.
Becoming more comfortable with teaching literacy skills to their child.
Presentation and format were easy to follow.
A better understanding of how my child develops as a reader and writer.

Having a somewhat clearer picture of the reading and writing at the kindergarten level.
Being able to comfortably ask questions at the workshops.
Learning to be more comfortable working on reading and writing at home with child.

Five out of six respondents said the workshop on Reading Strategies was the most beneficial of the workshops. Other comments were: They were refreshing and quite interesting. I wish each workshop was held twice. I am glad and thankful to the school. I was really impressed by the whole thing. My children have all benefited from my attending.

What families liked best about the program was:

Child's literacy skills improved.
Confidence of child was boosted.
The individual and small group attention given to a child.
Enthusiasm and dedication of the teachers.
Parent involvement.
Parent, child, teacher interaction.
Exposure to a variety of strategies to teach literacy.

Families rated each of the following statements as either a large amount or somewhat of a large amount: The teacher's instruction helped my child's literacy progress. The activities allowed my child to progress and learn as a reader and writer. My child learned skills to use for future school success. The volunteer participation helped my child's literacy progress. This program positively impacted my child and my own school experience. My child enjoyed attending this program. I enjoyed volunteering.

Parents noted disadvantages of program were the early morning start time for the program and PM session kindergartners participating in a morning program.

Other comments were: This was a good experience. Thank you teachers for the work and dedication to the children of Freeport.

Data Analysis

The Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test was conducted on the two groups to analyze the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the literacy achievement of the two groups of students. When examining the increases in scores on the Marker Book assessment, the results achieved statistically significant difference in score increases. (at the .01 level of significance)

The increases in scores on the Observational Survey for the two groups were examined, also, using the Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test. The results of this test achieved statistical significance at the .01 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Findings/Conclusions

The information accumulated through the surveys completed by families involved in the Family Links overwhelmingly support continuation of the program. They cited reasons such as increasing parental knowledge of literacy acquisition, extreme student success with literacy development, positive experiences as volunteers and workshop participants, and being more comfortable supporting their children's educational experience at home. Families felt that they knew more about how children develop literacy abilities after completing the program. Many believed that they had gained many strategies to encourage and develop their child's literacy abilities. With confidence, I believe, we accomplished the parent objectives of the Family Links Program. All participants felt the program had great value to themselves and their children.

The results of this study demonstrate that at risk students for literacy who receive literacy instruction beyond the regular kindergarten program achieve higher literacy development than do their at risk peers at Morse Street School. Family Links students' scores on both the Marker Book assessment and the Reading Recovery Observational Survey increased dramatically compared to the pretest to posttest scores of the control group. (significance level = .01) The evidence clearly supports that at risk kindergarten students in Freeport who receive consistent literacy instruction beyond the regular school day significantly improve their literacy skills. I strongly believe we accomplished the student objectives of increasing at risk kindergarten students literacy skills and increasing their confidence as a learner. It has been demonstrated that achievement gains before first grade have long term impact and inhibit retention in future grades as well as special education placement. (Sheehan, R., 1991., and Adcock, E., 1980). It seems in this case, that an early intervention program such as the Family Links program is a monetary saving compared to the costly process of educational remediation and a benefit to many families of the Freeport School community.

	Marker Books Control Group		
	Pretest	Posttest	Differences in Scores
Student	Jan-98	Jun-98	
A	94	80	-14
B	89	96	7
C	94	100	6
D	90	96	6
E	94	75	-19
F	94	93	-1
G	94	93	-1
H	94	90	-4
I	94	50	-44
Mean	93	85.89	-7.11
Median	94	93	

	Marker Books Experimental Group		
	Pretest	Posttest	Difference in score
Student	Jan-98	Jun-98	
A	66	85.5	19.5
B	91	96	5
C	94	96	2
D	85.5	96	9.5
E	83	96	13
F	94	96	2
G	94	100	6
H	80	100	20
I	94	98	4
Mean	86.83	95.67	8.84
Median	91	96	5

	Observational Survey Control Group		
	Pretest	Posttest	Differences in scores
Student			
A	19	67	48
B	82	113	31
C	102	105	3
D	90	119	29
E	38	63	25
F	122	122	0
G	53	76	23
H	76	85	9
Mean	74.89	93.75	18.86

	Observational Survey Experimental Group		
	Pretest	Posttest	Difference in Scores
Student	Jan-98	Jun-98	
A	37	83	46
B	48	108	60
C	73	150	77
D	85	115	30
E	33	112	79
F	70	130	60
G	60	128	68
H	76	117	41
I	87	137	50
Mean	63.22	120	56.78
Median	70	117	47

References

Adcock, E. P. and Others, (1980). A Comparison of Half-Day and Full Day Kindergarten Classess on Academic Achievement. Maryland State Department of Education, Baltimore.

Sheehan, R. and Others, (1991). Factors Contributing to Success in Elementary Schools: Research Findings for Early Childhood Educators. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 6, 66-75.

Vopat, J., (1994). The Parent Project: a workshop approach to parent involvement. Stenhouse Publishers, York, ME.

Appendix

Family Links Program Questionnaire

Dear Families of Family Links Program

This survey contains questions concerning the various components of the Family Links program that you and your child were involved in since January of this school year. Please just take a few minutes to fill out this survey as best you can. Your input is extremely valuable to us. Please try to be as specific and truthful as possible about this pilot program. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is included for anonymity. Thank you for your time, thoughts, and support of this program.

Kyle Rhoads
Family Links Teacher

1. **Explain the greatest impact this program had on you:**

2. **The most beneficial parts of this program for my child were:**

3. **The least beneficial parts of this program were: (Please try to explain.)**

4. **Explain the strongest part of this program.**

5. **Explain the part you think you would most want changed.**

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6. **Please rate the following statements using the scale below.**

5	4	3	2	1
A large amount	Somewhat	Some	A little	Not at all

The teachers' instruction helped my child's literacy progress ____

The activities allowed my child to progress and learn as a reader and writer ____

My child learned skills he/she will continue to use for future school success ____

The volunteer paticipation helped my child's literacy progress ____

I learned skills and strategies I am able to use at home with my child ____

My child's self-confidence as a learner has increased ____

This program has positively impacted my child's school experience ____

This program has positively impacted my school experience ____

My child enjoyed attending this program. ____

I enjoyed volunteering. ____

7. **Explain what you gained from being a volunteer.**

7. **I believe the Family Links program should continue to be provided for kindergarten families.** (Please Circle One)

YES NO

8. **Please, feel free to add any comments that you feel we need to know.**

Family Links Workshop Questionnaire

Dear Families of Family Links Program:

Our grant requires us to evaluate our program. Please, take just a few minutes to fill out this survey as best you can. Your input is very important to this pilot program. Please try to be as specific and truthful as possible. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is included for anonymity. Thank you for your time and thoughts. Please return by May 15th.

Kyle Rhoads
Family Links Teacher

1. **The most beneficial parts of the workshops were:**

2. **The least beneficial parts of the workshops were:** (Please try to explain)

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3. **Circle the workshop that was most useful.**

1. Reading to your child 2. Writing 3. Reading Strategies 4. Summer Ideas

4. **Circle the workshop that was least useful.**

1. Reading to your child 2. Writing 3. Reading Strategies 4. Summer Ideas

5. **Was too much or too little material covered at the workshops?**

6. **What topics do you feel you would like to know more about to help your child's education?**

7. Please rate each of the following statements using this scale.

5	4	3	2	1
A lot	Somewhat	Some	A little	Not at all

Each workshop helped me with my child's development as a reader and a writer. ____

The workshops format was easy to follow. ____

The workshops have helped me to be more comfortable with working on reading and writing at home. ____

I felt comfortable asking any questions. ____

I have a clearer picture of reading and writing at the kindergarten level. ___

I use strategies learned from the workshops with my child at home. ____

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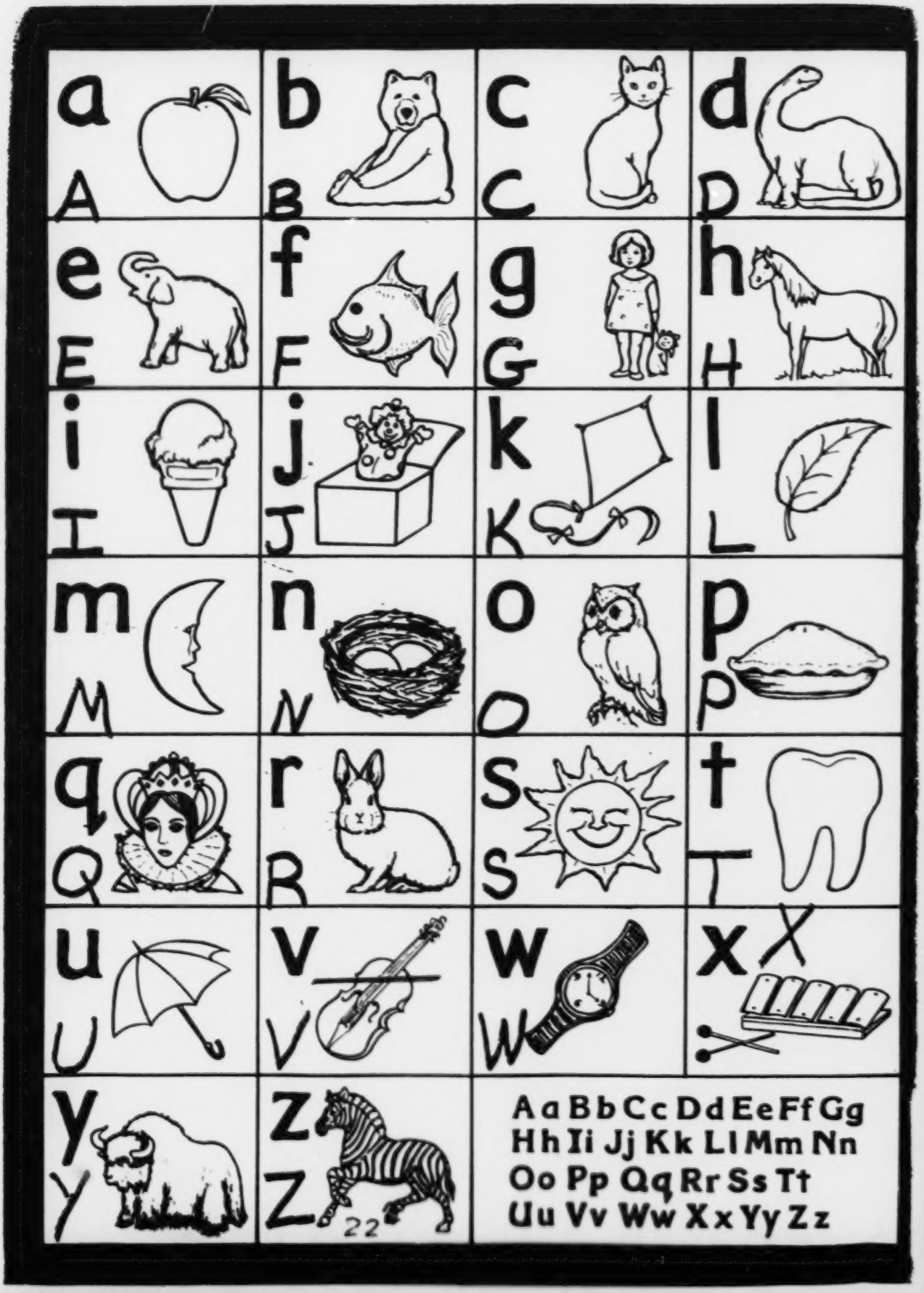
8. Overall, what are your feelings about the workshops?

9. I believe these workshops should continue to be provided for kindergarten families.
(Please Circle One)

YES NO

10. Please, feel free to add any comments that you feel we need to know.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